

Christianity and the State.

A SERMON,

Preached in the "College Hall,"

DEC. 28, 1873.

BY

THOMAS H. SKINNER.

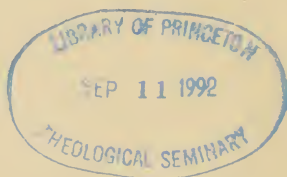
Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, of Cincinnati, Ohio.



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CINCINNATI, *December 29, 1873.*

REV. THOMAS H. SKINNER, D. D.

Dear Sir:—

With feelings and convictions similar to those we expressed to you in our request for a copy of your sermon on Christianity and Sectarianism, we would earnestly ask that the discourse you preached yesterday morning, on Christianity and the State, may be placed at our disposal for publication.

Very truly yours,

JOHN SHILLITO,
GEORGE WILSHIRE,
S. J. BROADWELL,
HUGH MCBIRNEY,
RICHARD SMITH,
WM. H. NEFF.

MESSRS. JOHN SHILLITO, GEO. WILSHIRE, and others.

Gentlemen:—

Assured by your confidence and good opinion, I cheerfully comply with your request.

Very respectfully yours,

THOMAS H. SKINNER.

CINCINNATI, *December 30, 1873.*

Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea,
happy is that people, whose God is the
Lord. Psalm cxliv. 15.

I HAVE a large theme and a limited time. I must omit many things, and condense much, and forego illustrations that would give interest and emphasis to my subject; and even as it is, I am afraid I shall greatly weary your patience.

I am to speak to-day of Christianity and the State, their inter-relations, and inter-dependencies, and mutual obligations. Our subject is not the Church and the State. Call to mind what was said in my former discourse concerning the Church, and you will readily perceive the difference. There is one visible Catholic Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, consisting of all those who throughout the world profess the true religion. Now, of course, the relations of this widespread, universal Church to the State of Ohio, for example, are not before us. No nation, no State, can have any formal dealings with this vast body. Her Head and King is on high, and has instituted no medium of intercourse with the "powers that be" in the world.

Then there are the particular churches or denominations that compose this Catholic Church. In our land we have established, as a vital principle of the organic national

law, the separation of the State from them all. Each and every denomination is left, in its distinctiveness, to promote and extend its own influence. The State can take no part in this work. The State can not patronize or support any branch of the Church universal, that may be found within its borders. This is, we trust, the settled and unchangeable policy of our nation. For while these denominations all agree in the common Christianity, and thus are vital members of the one, great Church and kingdom of God, they each hold to their own special methods and modes of internal government, arrangements, and worship, and in many cases to some divergent though unessential doctrines. They have different terms of church fellowship, different views of ministerial qualifications. And, owing to the infirmities of human nature, it has come to pass that these distinguishing peculiarities are held to be so important that assumptions of superiority, rivalries, and jealousies exist, and make it not only inexpedient, but impossible, for the State to interpose, with safety to itself, and decide these differences in favor of one against the rest. As of old, Ephraim envied Judah and Judah vexed Ephraim. So it is now. None are perfect. All have errors and mistakes in differing degrees. The larger and stronger denominations often have an undue spirit of self-assertion, and do not behave themselves with true catholicity toward the weaker and smaller.

These imperfect denominations, made up of imperfect Christians, are all, notwithstanding their defects, aiming at the same blessed end, the salvation and renovation of the world; they all preach the same gospel; they are all promoting the common Christianity. Little by little they will purge off the baser metal, as, blessed be God, they are

gradually doing. And while they are drawing nearer to each other because they are drawing nearer to Christ, the common, life-giving, world-renewing Christianity is, by the separation of the State from its denominations, left free to assert itself as never before in human history. It is the supreme advantage of Christianity among us that she presents herself to the State in her own majesty, and beauty, and fair proportions; not as seen in the varying and divergent aspects of the denomination; not as Episcopacy or Lutheranism; not as Presbyterianism or Romanism; not as Methodism or Quakerism, may present her through the medium of their peculiarities, but as she shines in her native luster, clear as the sun, fair as the moon, comely as Jerusalem, beautiful as Tirzah, the common center, light, and life of all the individual churches. Would to God that civil authority would open its eyes to the bright vision!

It is this undenominational, cosmopolitan, divine religion that, though much obscured and misrepresented, has been working its way in the world for eighteen centuries, until she has become, *facile princeps* the leader in civilization, culture, education, morality, humanity, philanthropy. Christianity, sectarian, bigoted, limited! As I said on a previous occasion, nothing is so expansive, so far-reaching, so wisely conservative, so generous, so high-minded, so full of charity. It is Heaven's mercy to a lost world. Its commission is, "Go ye into all the world and preach my gospel to every creature." Its purpose and promise are new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness shall flourish universally. It aims and seeks, with all its powers, to infuse its benignant spirit into all the forms of human life, the State, society, business, the family, the innermost recesses of the soul. The denomin-

ations that profess it are to be more and more unified and purified, till they all see, eye to eye, and the State will be in full harmony with the perfected Church, they being one in spirit, one in purpose, one in extent; the Church, through Christianity, having brought kings to be her nursing fathers, and queens her nursing mothers; and the nations of them that are saved shall bring their glory and their honor unto her. Such is the issue, the eventual consummation toward which things are slowly, but surely, advancing, and for this every loyal disciple of Christ will hope, and pray, and labor, and consecrate all his energies.

And this brings us to our main subject: What has the State to do with Christianity, and what has Christianity to do with the State?

According to the Christian religion the State is not an artificial fabric of human formation, but is a divine institution under the special and constant control of the providence of God. How strong and significant is its language: "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive unto themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. They are the ministers of God for good to the obedient, but revengers to execute wrath upon them that do evil."

All the sanctions of Christianity gather about the State. Whatever its form—imperial, monarchical, republican—obedience thereto, whenever it does not conflict with the law of God; honor to kings, governors, magistrates, has been for eighteen hundred years the solemn teaching and enforcement of Christianity on the consciences of men.

In this respect the State owes an incalculable debt of *gratitude*, if nothing more, to our religion.

Then, the historic connection of Christianity with the State is close and vital. The States of Christendom, and pre-eminently the United States, are not, so to speak, in a state of nature. The American nation has sprung from Christendom—her latest born, strongest child. The fibers of her life twine, not about atheism, or rationalism, or natural religion, but about distinct, historic Christianity. An enormous influence, gathered from the past ages of our advancing religion, has been brought to bear upon the foundations, the springs and sources of our national life. Constitution, laws, regulations, civic customs, judicial processes, have been, if not created, inspired and toned by the religion of the Crucified One. It has broken up the morality, or, rather, the immorality, of ancient jurisprudence. Greece and Rome tolerated, and even legalized, practices that could not be named in America. To Christianity is due, and to nothing else, the amelioration, elevation, and widespread influence of woman. To Christianity is due the love and sacredness and elementary care of little children, who have been neglected by all unchristian States, degraded, as a class, exposed by myriads, and, sometimes, murdered by wholesale. The words of her King, "Suffer the little ones to come unto me," have ennobled and blessed them. Marriage is sanctified by her as by no religion, no State in history. She has given a day of rest to the people, a day of worship to the pious. She has broken the bonds of the captive and the slave. She has opened the prison doors of the innocent victims of arbitrary power. She has revolutionized the penal codes of the nations, and throughout our land has substituted minor punish-

ments for that of death, in the cases of scores of offenses. By the doctrine of the unity in one blood of the race, by the sacrifice of Calvary for each and every human being, by the fraternity of the Son of God with the sons of men, she has given a name and a worth, a right and opportunity to the lowest and loftiest of the species, never dreamt of outside her religion. By her word and power all men have become equal before the law of the State and the tribunal of God. She has made the principle, "Do as you would be done by," an axiom in morals. Ah, yes! Christianity underlies and is the inspiration of too much that is good and valuable in the State of Ohio and all our other States, to be sneered at, or denied her place and rights in the Commonwealth. The enemies of Christianity could not, if they would, exorcise her spirit from the laws, institutions, customs, and social and civil life of America. And if the American State is to have a progressive development, that development must be in the spirit and direction of the original germ of its natural life. To cast off Christianity by law and adapt itself to a merely natural religion—which no mortal has yet satisfactorily defined—or to atheism or human reason, or anything beside, would be national death. The leaven of Christianity is the leaven that must still work in the lump. The salt of Christianity must be more and more scattered through the masses of the people, and give savor and strength and life to our institutions.

What, then, is the duty of the State in respect to Christianity? To answer this question we must first look at the proper province or sphere of the State as such. The functions of the State, through her legal authority, are few and simple. With us the national defense belongs to the Gen-

eral Government. In the individual State the repression of vice and wrong doing, so far as these are injurious to the community and the protection of the persons, rights, liberties and property of all citizens, comprise substantially its duties. The character of the laws by which these ends are secured is largely dependant upon the condition, views and sentiments of the people. Practically, the laws are the creation of the people, properly represented. The people govern; the people make and unmake constitutions and statutes. They do this by the expression of their will through majorities. A majority is stronger—if not wiser—than a minority, and a wise minority must succumb to an unwise majority. This is fundamental with us. The minority may regret it, may lament it, but if they are loyal citizens, loyal Christians, they will submit; and then by all fair and right methods do their best to turn the scale.

If, now, the prevention and repression of crimes, and the security of the persons, liberties, and property of the inhabitants, are the chief ends of the State authority, the question, how far may the State enter into the domain of education, morality, and religion to promote these ends, becomes one of great importance. The matter of *education* I will not now discuss.

As to *morality*, it is surely the interest of the State to see to it that honesty, truth, justice, temperance, self-respect, regard for the rights of others, and the like, are inculcated in the youthful minds of its population. To engraft morals on education, to some reasonable extent, is the dictate of National and State self-interest. As to religion, the question is difficult in a free Commonwealth governed by majorities, as a few words will evince. We may divide

religion into first, natural, so-called, and second, revealed, the Christian. As to the former, men greatly differ about its character, sanctions and motives. Some would consider idolatry, and Buddhism, and deism, forms of natural religion. Others would include all styles of infidelity and materialism—indeed, all man-made religions, of whatever kind—under this designation; and the State would find it an exceedingly difficult thing to know what to teach, in attempting to teach natural religion. As to revealed religion, Christianity claims for itself an exclusive place, as supernatural, immutable, divinely attested and authenticated. She will admit into her fellowship no paganism, nor Mohammedanism, nor superstition, nor any humanly devised religious system whatever, and, therefore, whether the State shall teach Christianity, either in its distinctive morality or in its supernal truths, must be, to some extent, a matter of public opinion—of majorities and minorities.

Only, let me here say, that if Christians should command a majority in the State, it is contrary to the genius of their religion to force itself, by the employment of legal authority, of State power, upon the people. Christians hold that men can be made really good and holy, only by a supernatural influence working through the supernatural truths she teaches. And one thing is sure, that American Christians do not consider the State, as the State now is, and for a long time will be, a very competent instructor in her high and sacred verities. They prefer to select, and educate, and appoint, and oversee the teachers of the blessed gospel of the Son of God, for themselves. If, through the force of their numbers and character, they can have the Bible read in the schools; if they can have prayer in the name of Christ appropriately offered; if they can have a

measure of the morality of Christianity ; supreme love to God, and love to man as to one's self ; forgiveness of enemies and injuries, and the like, taught ; if they can have a civil Sabbath appointed, and the Bible, as far as may be, made its oath book ; and if they can have men and women imbued with her spirit and faithful to the doctrines and the morality of Christianity, in place and power in the hospitals, and asylums, and alms houses, and reformatories, and prisons of the State, they will rejoice that they have so far molded public sentiment as to command such results, and they will do what they can to maintain the ground they have secured amid the varying ebb and flow of political opinion and power.

A word as to the Bible in our common schools. If the question were the introduction of the Bible into these schools ; if it were presented to us as a new problem to be settled by public wisdom ; in view of the character, opinions, and votes of large numbers of foreign born citizens, as well as of other influences that unite with them in opposition to the Bible, the question might be canvassed in full and free discussion. But when the question is, not the putting in, but the thrusting out of that book, the case is immensely different. Even a spelling-book, an algebra, a history, or a geography, can not be put out of a school without an implied condemnation of those books as inferior or unworthy. And, assuredly, no Christian should ever vote to exclude the book he claims to be divine, when once it has obtained place in the education of the State. No Christian should even seem to be willing to put a stigma or a slight upon the volume of life and salvation. Let others cast it out, if they will, from the schools of the

Commonwealth, but let not the disciples of Jesus Christ share in that solemn responsibility.

As, then, the State can not enact Christianity as the religion of its citizens; as it can not attempt to enforce obedience to her supernal morality; as it can not appoint her sacraments and ordinances as the worship of the people, it would appear that the simple and comprehensive duty of the State to Christianity is to leave her free—absolutely free, and to protect her in that freedom. Christians claim thus much under the fundamental charter of the nation, independent of majorities and minorities; and if this is, not only in name, but in reality granted, they ask little more.

And just here Christianity is at a great disadvantage. We are all well aware that she is not, and never has been, popular in the world; as for instance, Mohammedanism is in Arabia, or the religion of Confucius in China. The reasons for this are partly inherent in her very nature, and partly arise from the abuses and oppressions and perversions that have been practiced in her name. Christianity is no inert, torpid, quiet thing, no formal external religion, but a vital, earnest, urgent, aggressive power that will make itself felt wherever her voice can be heard, or the pressure of her spiritual energies can be brought to bear. She makes for herself the bitterest enemies and the warmest friends. The nearer she comes, the dearer or the deadlier does she appear. She confronts all the pride and vanity—the covetousness and envy, the dishonesty and wrong—the licentiousness, vice, and intemperance, the godlessness and selfishness of men, and goes about to turn the world upside down. She condemns an evil glance of the eye, as adultery; a feeling of enmity, as murder. She

drives a plowshare through human nature. Men oppose Christianity not because her Founder, her morals, her doctrines, her purposes, her fruits, are bad, but because they themselves are bad. Her ethereal sword pierces, unavails, and exposes the depths of the human heart, and men will blunt its edge, parry its thrusts, and wrest it from the hands of Christians if they can. The very depravity which the State is forced to recognize as the ground of its functions, which creates the necessity for restraining and repressing crime, the necessity for protecting the persons and property and rights of the people themselves, is the basis on which the faith and facts and morality of Christianity are reared. And as Christianity intensifies this and traces it to its fontal sources, and pronounces man degenerate and corrupt, his heart a fountain of evils, of all the evil in the world, and makes regeneration by the Holy Ghost an essential prelude and condition of righteousness and goodness, it is not surprising that men will do all they can to set her aside, and break her power wherever it exists. And then, as the faith and facts and book of Christianity are out of the order of nature, as they teem with miracles and signs and wonders, as they reach into the unseen and spiritual worlds, and reveal a triune personal God, acting by unexampled methods of sacrifice and substitution and efficacious power exerted in ways utterly incomprehensible by the finite mind, it is not at all strange that the pride of philosophy and science, the powers of rationalism and materialism, should rise in their might against her. She is a stumbling-block to some and foolishness to others, an unceasing offense to unrenewed human nature. These are broad, patent, unquestioned facts about our religion; the basis of what is, by many, considered

an irreconcilable hostility, which nothing but the extermination of Christianity can bring to an end.

Now, my friends, in these circumstances the danger is not a fanciful one, especially in cities and States where Christians and their friends are in a minority, that the organic law of the nation and of the State, which secures their religious rights and liberties, may be ignored, undermined, or overridden. Romanism and unbelief have already, in some instances, secured municipal and State patronage at the expense of Christianity. Therefore it is that we seek to hold the civil authority strictly to its fundamental, though sometimes, perhaps, difficult duty, of the protection of all the rights of this long hated, bitterly persecuted and despised, but now conquering and mighty religion. Her enemies have reason to tremble in view of her advances; but no lawful power exists in this land that can arrest her progress without treason to the rights of conscience, liberty of thought, and freedom of speech guaranteed in our magna charta. She anticipates no sudden revolution in the hostile opinion of the world concerning her. She expects opposition; she expects to be traduced and ridiculed and misrepresented and argued against. She makes no objection to all this; it can do little harm except to those who falsify and condemn her. Give her the freedom which the State in America is bound to give her, and she fears nothing from foes without or foes within. Never since the crucifixion of her Founder has she had such an opportunity as she now has over this broad land—this rising, expanding, vast Republic. If the Christians of the first ages, without protection from the State for their persons or property or religion, in constant peril of confiscation, exile, torture, and death, without culture or schools

or social standing, without chapels or churches for three long centuries, if they, by the simple force of their supernatural religion, conquered and supplanted paganism sustained by the power of ancient Rome, and sowed the seeds from which have grown modern civilization and Christendom. what, in a free Commonwealth, with full protection, with State and National institutions already impregnated and largely molded by her influence, with immense wealth and high position and great moral power, with a strong hold on the people through her seminaries and academies and colleges, through her culture and literature, her churches, her Sabbath-schools and her vast benevolent and philanthropic institutions, with her roots struck deep everywhere—what, under these circumstances with her King in heaven ruling and overruling all things for her, and the Holy Spirit on earth with His subtle, secret, and omnipotent energy working through her, and blessed prophecies and promises as sure to come to pass as the sun is to rise to-morrow morning, what may not a free Christianity in a free State accomplish?

For, though there is what may be considered a hard side, a repulsive aspect in Christianity to human nature as it is, there are, notwithstanding, elements of surpassing attractiveness and power and blessedness in her, which all can see and feel. The world may be very selfish and godless and arrogant, but the world confessedly is full of mistakes and failures, of variance and turbulence, of sickness and sadness and tears, of deep longings for something Heaven only can give. And Christianity has done more to rectify and reform and beautify and comfort and elevate and advance the race than all other things put together. From the deeps of the human soul the cry comes up, all over

the earth, for relief and renovation and liberty and right. Just what Christianity proffers and promises, man wants and man must have: not only freedom from all oppression, liberty, equal rights, advancement, elevation, universal peace, and general prosperity, but, also, a reconciled God and Father in heaven, pardon, acceptance, goodness, guidance, consolation, hope in the life that now is, and fruition in the life that is to come. Verily, Jesus Christ is, consciously or unconsciously, "The Desire of all nations." Christianity is not a cold, offensive dogma, an impracticable morality; but take her all in all, she is a life and a power adapted to men and affairs and circumstances throughout the world. She has the human conscience on her side with the hopes and fears of our immortal nature and divine relations, and she exists and toils only to make men righteous and honorable, and happy and good for time and eternity. Thus she blends her supernatural revelations with a blessed, useful and self-denying life, and no criticism, no dialectics, no science, no philosophy, no infidelity can refute a religion which, in a world of sin and selfishness, and wrong and sorrow and sickness, makes men holy, cheerful, upright, just, God-fearing and man-loving; yea, which transforms the king of terrors into a messenger of mercy, and the grave into a resting-place for their dust, till the trump of God shall awaken the dead and introduce them into the glories of an unending heaven.

Christianity in the most unfavorable circumstances, now oppressed and crushed by the State, and now in an unhallowed alliance with the State—now manacled and forbidden to lift her banner among the nations, and now turned into an instrument of tyranny and oppression, her supernatural revelations used for human ambition and avarice—

has wrought a vast and blessed work, notwithstanding all. And in these last times she has crossed the ocean and taken up her abode on our soil; and here, as we have seen, she appears, when unvailed, in her normal, gracious and glorious character. Separated from the State, and independent of denominational peculiarities, she occupies an immeasurably superior position to any she has held in her antecedent history.

Leave her free, do not trammel, do not shackle her; give her room and scope. If she gains victories, let no civil power take them away. She is obedient to law and upholds the State, as does nothing else. She is merciful to her foes, for in opposing her, like the murderers of her King, "they know not what they do." She takes no undue, unfair advantage of any one. The weapons of her warfare are not carnal, earthly, philosophical, or even moral. Not by civil enactments; not by force of arms; not by legal authority, human or divine; not by natural religion, but by her sheer celestial force does she advance: thus and thus only is she mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and Satan. And standing in this pulpit, as a minister of Christ, in the name of my Supreme Master, I tell this generation of statesmen, lawyers, legislators, constitution makers, judges, magistrates, civil officers, and voters, that it is at the peril of the common weal, yea, of every interest dear to the individual, the family, and the State, that they attempt to repress her energies or trample upon her benignant spirit, or buffet her, while she is building them up into greatness and glory.

Macaulay, in his essay on Milton, applying a beautiful fable Ariosto narrates, tells us that the spirit of liberty

was condemned at times to appear in the form of a foul and poisonous snake. Those who traduced her, while wearing this form, were forever excluded from participation in her blessings. But to those who beheld, beneath this disguise, her true character, and honored and protected her, she afterward revealed herself in the fullness of her native beauty, accompanied their steps, granted them all their wishes, filled their houses with wealth, made them happy in love, and victorious in war. Such, says he, is the spirit of liberty. More pertinent yet is the application of this fable to the spirit and genius of Christianity. By an inevitable law in history, she has been compelled to assume a form utterly foreign to her benign quality. The most odious garments of despotism have been woven around her, and the instruments of cruelty have been placed in her hand. At other times she has been condemned to appear a hateful superstition, or a crouching slave. Woe to the people, who in the hour of her involuntary humiliation, have added insult to her dishonor, and, spurning her from their presence, have failed to recognize in her a celestial form, even though corrupted by man. Exclusion from a share in the riches of her benefactions has been their mournful fate. But to those, who, beneath the disguise, detect her comeliness, and stripping off the vestments she abhors, discern a form of heavenly beauty and a countenance radiant with celestial grace, she, too, will not only accompany their steps and grant them their wishes, but she will fill their houses with a wealth unspeakable, make them happy in a love that is divine, and victorious in a war against the combined powers of darkness and of sin.

The Christian Church is determined, with God's bless-

ing, to preserve America a Christian State, and to continue its development in the line of its origin, until, as the grain of mustard seed. it shall grow to a mighty tree, overshadowing the earth, and under whose branches all people shall find a safe habitation. This supernatural religion, descended from the opened heavens, is to unite itself with all that is natural, and with the individual, the State, the nation, and the world; and God and man, heaven and earth, be made one in a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness shall dwell forever, and sin and selfishness, sorrow and sickness, death and the grave, be no more; and the golden age, when gods and men should exist in loving fellowship, of which ancient poetry and philosophy dreamed, shall be more than realized, in the reconciliation of divine faith and human reason, of revelation and science, of the cross and philosophy, and the true, the beautiful, and the good, in all things, be irradiated with celestial light and glory.

For lo ! the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world send back the song
Which now the angels sing—

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men!”





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